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ABSTRACT

Segregation in the schools contributes to inequality, while desegregation is a legitimate means of achieving equal educational opportunity. Not only is desegregation a constitutional right, but it is sound educational social policy. A commitment to deseqregation by State officials is a prerequisite to the reduction of racial isolation and the achievement of equal educational opportunity. Equal educational opportunity is the springboard for equal opportunity in the real world and is the hope of blacks, otner minorities and whites for fair participation in the economic marketplace. (Author/WI)

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POSITION STATEMENT ON DESEGREGATION

National Task Force on Desegregation Strategies

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

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The National Task Force on Desegregation Strategies was appointed in 1977 by Otis R. Bowen, M.D., then Governor of Indiana and chairperson of the Education Commission of the States' Steering Committee, acting on behalf of ECS and the task force's two other sponsoring agencies, the National Association of State Boards of Education and the Council of Chief State School Officers. The task force is a racially and ethnically diverse group of state and local education officials, community and religious leaders, and nationally respected scholars, all of whom have extensive experience with school desegregation.

TASK FORCE MEMBERS

Chairperson:

Francis Keppel
Director, Aspen Institute for Humanistic Studies
Aspen, Colorado

Tracy Amalfitano
Citizen Representative
Boston, Massachusetts

Gregory R. Anrig
Commissioner of Education
Boston, Massachusetts

Adrienne Bailey
President, National Association of State Boards of Education
Chicago, Illinois

Jorge L. Batista
President and General Counsel
Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund
New York, New York

Robert W. Blanchard
Superintendent of Schools
Portland, Oregon

Ronald Boyd
Associate Superintendent
Department of Public Instruction
Indianapolis, Indiana

Edgar Epps
Professor, University of Chicago
Chicago, Illinois

J. Michael Fay
Executive Director, Institute for Teacher Leadership
Los Angeles, California

Dudley E. Flood
Assistant State Superintendent
Raleigh, North Carolina

Calvin M. Frazier
Commissioner of Education
Denver, Colorado

Edythe Gaines
Consultant, Greater Hartford Consortium of Colleges and Universities
Hartford, Connecticut

Aaron Henry
President, NAACP
Clarksdale, Mississippi

Carolyn G. Hutto
County Board Member
Louisville, Kentucky

The Honorable M. Morris Jackson
State Senator
Columbus, Ohio

Mildred A. Kyles
Former School Board Member
Detroit, Michigan

Jane R. Mercer
Professor, University of California
Riverside, California

Thomas Pettigrew
Professor, Harvard University
Cambridge, Massachusetts

William Pollard
Director of Civil Rights
AFL-CIO
Washington, D.C.

Frank Rose
President, Lamar Society
Washington, D.C.

Lorenza Calvillo Schmidt
Member, State Board of Education
Long Beach, California

Marlin W. Schulz
Associate Secretary for Lutheran Schools
St. Louis, Missouri

APR 3 1979

FOREWORD

The National Task Force on Desegregation Strategies is the policy-making arm of the National Project and Task Force on Desegregation Strategies. The aim of both the project and task force is to stimulate interest at the state level in school desegregation, and to help states find ways to exercise effective leadership in promoting equal educational opportunity.

Now in its second year of operation, the task force is charged with the responsibility of identifying issues for study and of proposing policies for state use. This "Position Statement on Desegregation" is the task force's first public policy statement. It represents the combined views of the task force members on the need for further action to promote school desegregation and equal educational opportunity. It is also intended to provide a general background for future, more specific task force recommendations.

In many years of dealing with the issue of school desegregation, I have never worked with a group that has brought to bear on this problem a more effective mixture of knowledge, experience and thoughtful judgment. On this 25 year anniversary of the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education,* I commend this "Position Statement" to your attention.

Francis Keppel

Francis Keppel
Chairperson
National Task Force on Desegregation Strategies

February 1979

POSITION STATEMENT ON DESEGREGATION*

National Task Force on Desegregation Strategies

School desegregation is right for America. But being right has not been enough to bring it about. Candor compels us to note a seemingly intractible reality: racial bias is still pervasive. Its effects stem from a myriad of causes, most of which are institutional. Government policies and practices which result in school segregation still exist. Deliberate public policy created school segregation and deliberate public policy will be required to eliminate it.

Twenty-five years after Brown, *there is still no clear national commitment to reducing racial isolation in the schools. Although important progress has been made in the South and Southwest, segregation of black children is at a standstill in the Midwest and is increasing in the Northeast; across the nation, segregation is increasing for Hispanic children. During the past decade, no significant progress has been made in lessening the intense residential and school segregation which exists within the nation's largest cities. Desegregation gains in some large cities, however, prove that it can be done.*

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 established a cohesive federal policy for ending segregation in the schools. The years since 1964 have been marked by deliberate attempts to undermine that policy. The Congress has restricted federal administrative

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enforcement of desegregation by passing measures designed to limit the Department of Health, Education and Welfare's ability to enforce the Civil Rights Act. The Supreme Court has stepped back from its leadership role. In part, this retreat is due to the perception that desegregation is too costly. Much of the cost, however, stems more from resistance *to desegregation, than from desegregation itself.*

Segregation in the schools contributes to inequality, while desegregation is a legitimate means of achieving equal educational opportunity. Not only is desegregation a constitutional right and a moral imperative in an open society; it is sound educational and social policy as well.

Segregation and the denial of equal opportunity weaken American society. The denial of equal educational opportunity deprives children of a decent education; segregation deprives children of a complete education – the chance to know, and to learn to respect and appreciate each other. Of course, segregation is not the only cause of less than adequate education, and desegregation alone will not make schools adequate. An integrated education and a high quality of academic experience together constitute a good education in America.

Equal educational opportunity is the springboard for equal opportunity in the real world, and is the hope of blacks, other minorities and whites for fair participation in the economic marketplace. Equal educational opportunity is also a necessary prerequisite to the mutual respect and understanding among diverse groups on which the success and stability of American society depends.

American society is pluralistic. Effective preparation for life in a pluralistic society requires that children from diverse groups be brought into contact with each other. Thus, desegregation is a

critical factor in achieving a high quality education for all children.

Desegregation must be accompanied by educational changes. Integration is the ultimate goal. Integrated, as opposed to desegregated, schools are free from all forms of prejudice and discrimination. They strive to equalize advantages and to foster respect and appreciation for all groups. Integration should be encouraged within all schools, whether they are predominantly black, other minority or white.

The schools play a major role in transmitting our culture from generation to generation. The conditions of American society are reflected in its schools. The schools can perpetuate those conditions or, with public support, they can reflect the principles of democracy, thus leading the way and setting the pattern for society to follow.

The schools are only one institution among many. They are not solely responsible for creating segregation; nor are they solely responsible for eliminating it. But they are one of the most potent forces for change society has.

During the past 25 years, the nation has learned a great deal about the nature of integration. Integration is not mere desegregation. Nor is it the same thing as assimilation. Integration requires that desegregation be accomplished with attention to equity. Integration also requires instructional reform and opportunities for all groups to express and enhance their cultural and linguistic strengths. With integration as our goal, we must pursue desegregation with dedication, while at the same time protecting the rights of those children not yet touched by it.

Inaction is often easier than action. But American society must take a more active stance on behalf of equal educational opportunity if it is to fulfill the promise of Brown.

The states, by constitution, law and tradition, bear the responsibility for public education. With respect to desegregation, they have a special obligation. A few states have already assumed leadership roles with respect to desegregation and equal educational opportunity. States have the authority, and are better equipped than the courts, to shape and implement comprehensive strategies to achieve equal educational opportunity.

A commitment to desegregation by state officials is a prerequisite to the reduction of racial isolation and the achievement of equal educational opportunity. Such a commitment should be demonstrated in the following:

- *State legislation establishing a state policy of equal educational opportunity.*
- *State board rules or regulations establishing compliance and enforcement procedures for implementing the state legislation.*
- *Guidelines established by the state education agency to aid districts in creating integrated schools.*
- *State standards for desegregation and equal educational opportunity.*
- *Financial incentives for accomplishing desegregation and for establishing integrated schools.*

Each state has unique needs which may require unique actions, but all states have in common the obligation to act in these areas.

The task force calls upon state officials – governors, legislators, state boards, state superintendents, state education agency personnel, and related agencies – to endorse this statement and to be guided by its principles.

Moreover, the task force calls upon the national and state leadership within church, business and labor organizations, and on all citizens, to support state officials as they carry out the intent of this statement.

Cover art by Stephen Allen

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Project Staff

Ben Williams, Director
Mary Rashman, Research Associate
Denise Green, Project Services Coordinator
Sherry Atencio, Project Secretary

Representatives of the Sponsoring Agencies

Wesley Apker
Executive Director
National Association of State Boards of Education
526 Hall of the States
444 N. Capitol Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20001

Bill Israel
Director of Special Projects
Council of Chief State School Officers
Hall of the States
400 North Capitol Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20001

Homer Elseroad
Director
Elementary/Secondary Education
Education Commission of the States
1860 Lincoln Street, Suite 300
Denver, Colorado 80295

The views expressed herein are those of the National Task Force on Desegregation Strategies and do not necessarily represent those of its sponsoring or funding agencies.

The Education Commission of the States is a nonprofit organization formed by interstate compact in 1966. Forty-six states, American Samoa, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands are now members. Its goal is to further a working relationship among governors, state legislators and educators for the improvement of education. The commission offices are located at Suite 300, 1860 Lincoln Street, Denver, Colorado 80295.

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